

With the wind at their backs

Sailing program gives students access to water

By Colleen J. Joyce
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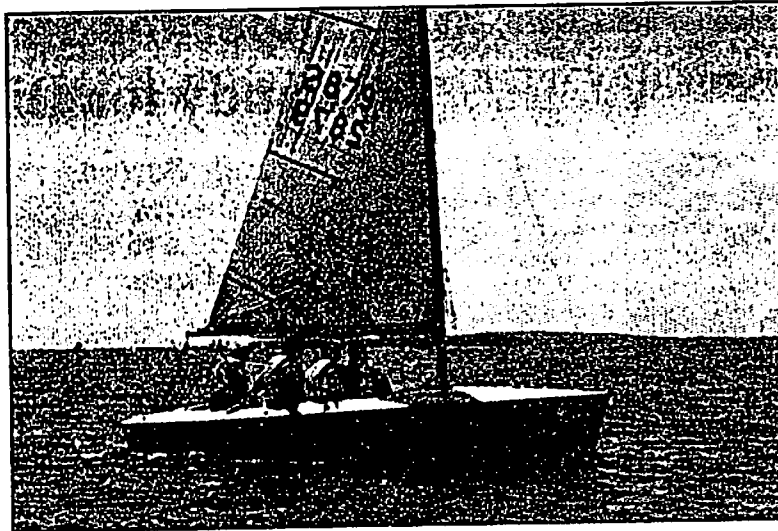
Hearing the bellowing wind rush against a sail while the ocean sprays mist from the side of a boat is a sensation many disabled people on the South Shore have never had the opportunity to experience, until now.

As the yellow life jackets are slipped on, and the blue straps click into place, five disabled sailing students can not keep their eyes off the water.

The student sailors are part of Duxbury Bay Maritime School's Accessail program, a recreational and instructional course for people with physical and mental disabilities.

The instructors lead the students to the dock, where some students look to the horizon where other boats are sailing, while others reach to touch the Flying Scott sailboat that rests in front of them.

They sail on the bay for one hour, and their laughter can be heard from the boats around them.



Staff photo/Colleen J. Joyce

A day in the sun — Physically and mentally challenged students enjoy a sailing lesson at Duxbury Bay Maritime School.

Last year a few trial classes were held to see if the school could properly handle the program, and it could, according to chairman of the Accessail committee Gene Ali.

"We had the resources to make Accessail happen," said Ali, "but we needed to see if there was an interest there."

There was so much interest from organizations and families that a director of adult and disabled sailing

was hired from a similar program in Miami.

Veronica Ploude has assisted in scheduling over 89 classes for 309 disabled children since she began in May.

"It is an amazing first year," said Ploude.

Even people with severe physical disabilities are able to sail with

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DBMS, said Ali. The school owns two Martin 16 sailboats with adjustable seats and a joystick control for people confined to wheelchairs or who have limited strength.

The school is dedicated to helping those in need, said DBMS executive director Ned Lawson.

But the school is also in need.

"We are always looking for volunteers," said Ali.

The need for volunteers to assist during classes is so great that some students may be denied sailing time, said Ploude.

The groups of four to eight students sail for one hour with instructors and parents or aides. One recreational class cost \$20 and an instructional class costs \$45.

"The smiles on the faces of the students are what make the program so rewarding," said Lawson.

Working with disabled sailors, said Lawson, forces instructors to use unconventional methods of teaching. Instead of using the vocabulary instructors are accustomed to, they have to speak to students on another level.

"Making a connection makes all

the difference in the world," said Lawson.

This unique program is the only one of its kind offered on the South Shore, said Ploude.

"It give these kids a chance do something they have never done before," said Lawson, "and that is important."

As the Flying Scotts breeze by on a flawless summer morning, the students look towards the instructor with smiles so bright they rival the sunlight reflected off the waters of Duxbury Bay.